



The Post Office

Bas-relief plaster cast, Queen Elizabeth II, by Arnold Machin

Of the items treated in the studio perhaps two of the most intriguing were two plaster casts measuring 474 x 410mm by the celebrated artist, sculptor, coin and stamp designer Arnold Machin (1911 – 1999). The bas relief image shows the Queen, and was used for the 'Machin series' of British definitive postage stamps dating from 1966. The image is still in use today and is the most reproduced work of art in history with around 320 billion copies. One cast belongs to the Post Office, the other to the Royal Philatelic Society.

The surface of the cast plaster is delicate and captures exquisite detail. Machin made a number of casts from the mould to enable him to fine tune the casts by making subtle adjustments to the form with hand tools. In conserving the casts it was especially important to retain that quality of surface.

Practical conservation measures involved removing ingrained surface dirt and dust, which is thought to have accumulated over the years whilst in the artist's studio. Deeply ingrained material may well be the residual releasing agent used by Machin during the casting process. It was not possible to remove all the ingrained dirt without subjecting the surface of the plaster to the risk of damage, so some marks were reduced as far as was practicable. When suitably lit the quality of modelling is quite superb.

